

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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FM AMEMBASSY ATHENS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9836

AMEMBASSY HELSINKI IMMEDIATE

S E C R E T ATHENS 5781

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MILI GR US MARR

SUBJ: AMMUNITION SHORTAGES AT SOUDA BAY

REF A. STATE 176590 B. ATHENS 5658 C. ATHENS 5150

HELSINKI FOR THE SECRETARY

DEPARTMENT PLEASE PASS AS APPROPRIATE

1. I HAVE JUST RETURNED FROM A MEETING WITH DEFENSE MINISTER AVEROFF DURING WHICH I CONVEYED TO HIM THE MESSAGE AND DECISIONS CONTAINED REFTEL A. CONCERNING AMMUNITION SHORTAGES AT SOUDA BAY. I TOLD HIM, AS INSTRUCTED, REFTEL, THAT THE USG DESIRED THAT ALL AMMUNITION, INCLUDING RELATED COMPONENTS, BE RETURNED AND THAT GREECE WAS ALSO EXPECTED TO PAY ALL COSTS ASSOCIATED WITH INSPECTION OF THE AMMUNITION AND TO REIMBURSE THE USG FOR ANY WHICH HAS BEEN DAMAGED OR WAS OTHERWISE UNSERVICABLE. AS INSTRUCTED, I TOOK A FIRM LINE TO ESTABLISH THE SERIOUSNESS WITH WHICH WE VIEWED THIS MATTER, AND I MADE THE OTHER POINTS INCLUDED IN PARAS. 3 AND 4 OF REFTEL A.

2. AVEROFF WAS QUITE UPSET BY OUR DECISION AND REACTED STRONGLY. HE SAID THAT FIRST OF ALL HE WANTED TO ACKNOWLEDGE ONCE AGAIN THAT GREECE WAS IN
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THE WRONG AND THAT THE USG HAD EVERY RIGHT TO REACH

THE CONCLUSIONS AND DECISION I HAD COMMUNICATED TO HIM. HE SAID THAT HE WOULD BEGIN PREPARATIONS FORTHWITH FOR THE RETURN OF THE AMMUNITION, ALTHOUGH HE THOUGHT IT WOULD TAKE SOMEWHAT MORE THAN THE TEN DAYS HE HAD ORIGINALLY ESTIMATED. HE SAID HE WOULD BE IN TOUCH WITH US AGAIN WITHIN SEVERAL DAYS TO LET US KNOW THE DATE BY WHICH ALL THE AMMUNITION WOULD BE RETURNED.

3. AT THE SAME TIME, AVEROFF - WHOSE FACE WAS RIGID AND DRAINED OF COLOR - SAID HE WOULD NOT CONCEAL FROM ME THAT THE USG THAT HE WAS "VERY ANNOYED" BY OUR DECISION. HE SAID IT WAS "VERY BAD NEWS" AND THAT THERE WOULD BE A "VERY UNFAVORABLE REACTION" NOT ONLY THROUGHOUT THE GREEK MILITARY ESTABLISHMENT BUT WITHIN THE GREEK GOVERNMENT AS WELL. AVEROFF SAID THAT OUR DECISION, NOTWITHSTANDING THE THOROUGHLY REASONABLE EXPLANATION HE HAD MADE TO US AND THE ABSOLUTELY CORRECT POSITION TAKEN BY THE GOG ON THIS MATTER ONCE IT WAS BROUGHT TO THEIR ATTENTION A FEW WEEKS AGO (REFTEL C), WAS MOST DISAPPOINTING.

4. AVEROFF SAID THAT OUR DECISION WOULD BE CONSIDERED BY THE GREEK GOVERNMENT AND GREEK MILITARY AUTHORITIES IN ONE OF TWO LIGHTS, AND PERHAPS BOTH. FIRST, IT WOULD BE CONSIDERED AS A "SEVERE PUNISHMENT" BY THE USG FOR THE GREEK MISAPPROPRIATION OF THE AMMUNITION. SECOND, IT WOULD BE CONSIDERED AS A U.S. "PRESSURE" WITH RESPECT TO THE "BASES AND FACILITIES" (HE DID NOT ELABORATE) AND/OR AS A RETALIATION FOR GREEK EMBASSY STATEMENTS IN WASHINGTON AND THE POSITION OF GREECE WITH RESPECT TO THE TURKISH ARMS EMBARGO.

5. I DID NOT TRY, GIVERN THE INSTRUCTIONS CONTAINED IN REFTEL A., TO LIGHTEN OR MINIMIZE THE IMPORTANCE OF THE MESSAGE AND DECISION I HAD CONVEYED TO AVEROFF. I FELT HE HAD TO RECEIVE THE FULL FORCE OF THE SERIOUSNESS WITH WHICH WE VIEWED THIS MATTER. AT THE SAME TIME, I DID DENY TO HIM

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THAT THIS DECISION REPRESENTED IN ANY WAY "PRESSURE" OR RETALIATION AGAINST GREECE FOR OTHER POSITIONS TAKEN OR ACTIONS BY THE GREEK GOVERNMENT ON MATTERS NOT DIRECTLY RELATED TO THE AMMUNITION SHORTAGES. AVEROFF LISTENED BUT WAS SKEPTICAL. HE SAID THAT THE INESCAPABLE REACTION IN GREECE WOULD BE THAT THE U.S. WAS -- AND THEN HE MADE A TWISTING GESTURE WITH HIS HAND TO DENOTE "PUTTING THE SCREWS ON." ONCE AGAIN,

I STRESSED THE SERIOUSNESS OF THE MISAPPROPRIATION OF THE AMMUNITION AND THE FAILURE OF THE GOG TO REPORT THE SHORTAGES AND, INDEED, TO PRESENT AS LATE AS LAST MARCH 31 -- MANY MONTHS AFTER THE AMMUNITION WAS TAKEN -- FALSE REPORTS AFFIRMING THAT THE U.S.-OWNED AMMUNITION WAS STILL IN PROPER STORAGE. I SAID THAT THE FACTS OF THE MATTER SPOKE FOR THEMSELVES AND THAT THE DECISION TO HAVE THE AMMUNITION RETURNED OBVIOUSLY STOOD ON ITS OWN MERITS, AND HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH UNRELATED DEVELOPMENTS ELSEWHERE.

6. AVEROFF REPEATED HIS EXTREME UNHAPPINESS WITH THIS NEWS BUT SAID THAT HE WOULD BEGIN AT ONCE TO MAKE PREPARATIONS TO HAVE THE AMMUNITION RETURNED. HE WOULD LET US KNOW IN "A FEW DAYS," HE SAID, THE DATE BY WHICH THE AMMUNITION WOULD HAVE BEEN RETURNED. ON THE POINT CONCERNING TURKEY HAVING "DONE THE SAME THING," HE SAID HE WOULD LET US KNOW IF HE OBTAINED ANY FURTHER INFORMATION.

7. COMMENT. AVEROFF WAS THE MOST UPSET BY FAR THAT I HAVE EVER SEEN HIM. HE OBVIOUSLY IS NOT RELUCTANT TO CONVEY OUR DECISION TO THE GREEK MILITARY, WHO HE THINKS WILL PROBABLY CONCLUDE THAT THIS IS BUT ANOTHER HARSH ANTI-GREEK SLAP BY THE USG AGAINST GREECE AND WILL WORK AGAINST THE BRIDGES HE HAS BEEN TRYING SO ENERGETICALLY TO REBUILD BETWEEN OUR TWO COUNTRIES.

8. AS I WAS LEAVING HIS OFFICE, AVEROFF INDICATED TO ME THAT HE WOULD HAVE TO REPORT THE MATTER AT ONCE TO PRIME MINISTER CARAMANLIS IN HELSINKI, AND HE INDICATED THAT HE MIGHT SUGGEST TO CARAMANLIS OR FOREIGN MINISTER BITIOS THAT THEY TAKE THE MATTER
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UP WITH PRESIDENT FORD OR SECRETARY KISSINGER IF THEY HAD A SUITABLE OPPORTUNITY BEFORE DEPARTING HELSINKI.

9. WE WILL PROVIDE SEPARATELY EMBASSY COMMENTS ON THE PUBLIC AFFAIRS ASPECT OF THIS SUBJECT. KUBISCH

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